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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,
I/GNEA, B/BXN, B/BRN, NEA/PPD, NEA/IPA FOR ALTERMAN
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, April 7, focuses on escalating violence in Iraq, in particular between Shiites and Coalition forces. Banner headlines proclaim a "massacre" in Fallujah and provide estimates of casualties on both sides. Another lead story highlights the Jordanian State Security court's announcement of convictions in the trial of those accused in the murder of U.S. Embassy employee Laurence Foley in October 2002, and a statement by the Embassy expressing appreciation for the hard work and efforts of Jordanian security officials. Another lead story notes Syrian President Bashar Assad's meeting with King Abdullah today in Amman.

Editorial Commentary

-- "The Iraqi people: from oppression to occupation to extremism"

Daily columnist Bader Wardam writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (04/07): "We have to be logical in viewing the flaming confrontation between the populist authority Muqtada Al-Sadr and the military occupation authority as part of the power struggle in Iraq. Had the young Al-Sadr's revolution been in defense of Iraq and Iraqi sovereignty and against the occupation, then it would have started on April 9, 2003, but it comes a year late. Muqtada Al-Sadr acquired his authority from his followers and through his religious supporters. His (movement) is very similar to the Taliban-type of fundamentalism.. Al-Sadr worked shrewdly to strengthen his authority, as all other authorities in Iraq were crumbling. The authority of the former regime and that of Al-Baath party have ended. The oppressive authority of the occupation has been completely discredited as Iraqis have come to believe that the American army is not there to liberate them but to occupy them and rob their resources. The authority of Al-Sistani deteriorated because of his repeated work at co-existence with the American occupation. As for the authority of the governing council, it was shaky from day one and has now proved a total failure. Authority in Iraq is absent, waiting for someone to grab it. The fiery confrontation between the authority of Muqtada Al-Sadr and the American occupation is but a link in the chain of this struggle that is going to last for a long time in Iraq.. The Taliban-type approach adopted by Muqtada Al-Sadr throughout the past year did not bother the Americans as much as it did the Iraqis. However, as soon as Al-Sadr decided to face the occupation authority, the American war against him started, which led to the fact that the Iraqis rallied around Al-Sadr because he now represents the people's authority that rejects the occupation. What is happening in Iraq now is another example of the utter stupidity of the American administration in Iraq. The administration fought the Taliban in Afghanistan, but now they created in Iraq and in the heart of the Arab and Muslim world a Taliban-like movement that acquires its legitimacy from religious concepts and from fighting the occupation.. Al-Sadr may get arrested, but the Taliban of Iraq has risen and will not stop."

-- "An open war in Iraq"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (04/07) editorializes: "It is too early to say that the American occupation forces have lost control of the situation, but it is certain that the situation is liable to deteriorate, particularly if the occupation forces insist on arresting Muqtada Al-Sadr. The whole situation needs to be handled wisely and cautiously, lest Iraq become a war zone and the expectations of many people, who believe that Iraq is on the verge of a civil war leading to its division, become true."

